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P.E.N. Conference Opens; Speakers Rap Soviet Absence

New York, June 13 (AP)—Some 600 writers from 50 nations—not including the Soviet Union—gathered here today for the opening session of the International P.E.N. Congress, the first held in this country in 42 years.

International P.E.N. is a worldwide organization of poets, playwrights, essayists, editors and novelists.

The Soviet absence was underscored by playwright Arthur Miller, international president of P.E.N.

P.E.N. First To Protest

"In the absence of an official explanation (for the lack of a delegation)," Miller said, "it is inevitable to assume that it was feared the Sinyavsky-Daniel case would have brought strong criticism from members of P.E.N. upon the delegation. In all likelihood this would have been so." (Soviet writers Andrei D. Sinyavsky and Yuli M. Daniel were sentenced to hard labor for smuggling works to the West.)

"Nevertheless, I would like to think that in such criticism there would have been something more than a political condemnation of

the Soviet Union," Miller said. Miller said P.E.N. was the first to "protest and condemn" the trial of the Soviet writers and the punishments.

Saul Bellow, author of the prize-winning novel, "Herzog," gave the Congress's keynote address in which he was sharply critical of current trends in writing which, he said, is much concerned with "dehumanization of art."

President Johnson had sent a message of welcome to the writers.